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ABSTRACT

The focus of most analysts involved in education reform seems to be whether charter schools are successful. This paper identifies 53 research-based studies that draw mainly objective conclusions based on evaluation of data. Literally, hundreds of policy papers, study articles, and analyses have been written on the charter-school phenomenon, an educational innovation that has skyrocketed from just one school in 1992 to more than 2,000 schools in place for the 2000-2001 school year. This report summarizes each of the 53 studies and offers critiques of charter schools. The majority (50) of these papers assert that charter schools have been innovative, accountable, and successful and have created both opportunities for the children who attend them and have had a positive "ripple" effect on traditional public schools within their jurisdiction. An appendix contains common criticisms from opponents and proof they are unfounded. (DFR)

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What the Research Reveals About Charter Schools

A Summary and Analysis of the Studies

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WHAT THE RESEARCH REVEALS ABOUT CHARTER SCHOOLS

Are charter schools successful? That seems to be the focus of most analysts involved in education reform, and yet many conclusions are drawn from limited or selected data. The Center for Education Reform has analyzed the existing research universe and identified 53 actual research-based studies that draw mainly objective conclusions based on evaluation of data. There are as many as a hundred more reports and analyses that also help paint a picture of a growing reform, yet as these reports tend to be more opinionated and subjective — both pro and con — they were not used for this compendium.

It is important to note, however, that the body of data, research, and analyses done in the charter school arena is disproportionately larger than what exists for other comparable reform efforts. The question "what do we know about charter schools?" has a simple answer: Plenty.

It is true that evidence of student achievement is only now starting to build. Without years of baseline data in place and available, observers have had to wait until various state assessments took root in some places, or where there's three or more years of standardized tests for nearly identical groups of children. States like Arizona are collecting data so that soon it will be possible to track the same student wherever he or she goes. But until every state can offer a better set of data, we'll have to look to limited sets of information for comparability.

That said, the data does show evidence of charter school success.

Literally hundreds of policy papers, studies articles, and analyses have been conducted of the charter school phenomenon, an educational innovation that has skyrocketed from just one school in 1992 to more than 2000 schools in place for the 2000-2001 school year.

Contained in this report are the 53 objective, research-based studies offering a critique of charter schools. The conclusion of the overwhelming majority (50) of these papers is that charter schools have been innovative, accountable, and successful and have created both opportunities for the children who attend them and a "ripple" effect on traditional public schools within their jurisdiction.

THE STUDIES

2000

1) Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools, Third Year Evaluation: March and July 2000

Findings: In comparing Texas charter schools with traditional public schools, charters contain higher percentages of African-Americans (33% vs. 14%), Hispanics (43% vs. 39%), and economically disadvantaged children (52.6% vs. 48.5%). More recently opened charters tend to serve a higher proportion of African-American, Hispanic, and special education populations than those opened longer. More than half of charter school students, most of which were at risk of dropping out, passed all TAAS tests given, with at least 67% passing at least one. The percentage of at-risk students in charter schools passing all TAAS tests increased by 15.9 points vs. a 5.2 point increase for all state students.

2) Does Charter School Competition Improve Traditional Public Schools? (Paul Teske, Mark Schneider, Jack Buckley and Sara Clark, SUNY-Stony Brook): June 2000

Findings: Charter competition has not induced large changes in district-wide operations, despite the loss of significant numbers of students leaving districts schools for charter schools, because state policymakers have created a cushion to alleviate any financial effect of departing students on districts. States provide resources to districts to "prop them up." Despite the mitigated effects of competition, however, the authors found widespread evidence of school officials responding to charters, especially where superintendents were already pre-disposed toward reform of their operations. Faced with competition from charter schools, principals do adopt more innovations at their schools. This study also finds that charters are more consumer-friendly, treat parents better than traditional public schools, and may be evolving as substitute for private schools.

3) Initial Study of Pennsylvania Charter Schools (Western Michigan University, Gary Miron, The Evaluation Center): Spring 2000

Findings: A complete survey of staff, student, and parents in Pennsylvania charters for school year 1998-99. This survey finds that 82% of charter teachers are certified (Pennsylvania law requires at least 75%), that they are well qualified, attrition is low,

and attitudes toward facilities and salaries are mixed. Enrollment of boys and girls is even, minorities (mainly African-Americans) make up 75% of charter enrollments, most of who had previously been in traditional public school, and parents tended to choose these schools in search of something better. Parents of charter students are not the cream, with even split between single and two parent homes, and only 32% hold college degrees.

4) **A Report on Philadelphia Charter Schools: Facing Challenges, Forging Solutions, (Drexel University/Foundations): May 2000**

Findings: This study examines what helps or hinders charters, finding that the lack of funding, unclear policies, and local district tensions impede charters negatively while with community support and thorough communication charters can succeed.

5) **Community Schools in Ohio: First Year Implementation Report (Ohio Legislative Office of Legislative Oversight): March 2000**

Findings: Based on the experience of the first 15 Ohio charter or "community" schools, the report finds that most charter operators started their schools in response to deficiencies in traditional public schools, but start up obstacles effected their first year in operation, including difficulty getting start up money, finding facilities, and in recruiting experienced teachers. Community schools enroll a higher proportion of minority and poor students and have attendance rates that compare favorably.

6) **U.S. Department of Education: National Study of Charter Schools, Fourth Year Report: January 2000**

Findings: Describes various operational details and effects of charter schools as of the 1998-99 year. Documents high waiting list, at 7 of 10 charters, and confirms that only 4% of all charters have closed down. Median student teacher ratio slightly below traditional public schools at 16 students per teacher, most charter schools are small. Nationwide, students in charter schools have similar demographic characteristics to students in all public schools. However, charter schools in some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students. White students make up about 48% of charter school enrollment in 1998 compared to about 59% of public school enrollment in 97-98. Charters enroll slightly higher percentage of poorer children, and nearly identical numbers of LEP students. Reported percentages of children with disabilities is about 3% less than traditional schools at 8% on average, and 9 out of 10 charters are held accountable for student achievement, compliance with regulations, student attendance.

7) Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study: The Characteristics, Status and Performance Record of Colorado Charter Schools (Colorado Department of Education): January 2000

Findings: A review of successes and failures of Colorado charter schools as evidenced in the 1998-99 school year. Finds that performance of charter schools on state assessment is stronger than sponsoring district averages and when compared to other socio-economically similar traditional schools. Most charters were meeting or exceeding the goals set out in their charter contract and level of parental involvement, waiting lists, satisfaction were all high. Charters were diverse in size, philosophy, and program, but student populations enrolled in charter schools did not reflect same diversity as in the state as a whole.

1999

8) Massachusetts Charter School Profiles, 1998-99 School Year (Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center): December 1999

Findings: A yearly review of the status of charter schools that analyzes demographics, such as the fact that forty-three percent of charter school students are racial or ethnic minorities compared with twenty-three percent on average in the state. 38% of charter school students are from low-income families compared to a state average of 26%, and demand continues to exceed supply, with a ratio of 5.1 interested applicants for every one slot. In May 1998, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tested proficiency of students in fourth, eight and tenth grade in several core areas. Statewide averages fell in the "need for improvement area" but some charter schools showed promise. On average, charter school students scored about five points higher than students in the host districts, including one charter (Francis W. Parker Charter) which had the third highest combined score among state high schools.

9) First Annual Arizona Charter School Parent Satisfaction Survey (Arizona: Human Resources Policy Corporation, Lewis Solmon): October 1999

Findings: Surveys of 13,812 parents of charter schools statistically analyzed provides insights into parent attitudes from 1999. Thirty one percent of parents rated their school an A+ in terms of quality and 35% rated their schools an 'A'. Only 14% rated their schools a C, D or F. The survey results indicate that fewer parents rated their previous school as an A, suggesting that charters are largely attracting dissatisfied parents. A high percentage (72%) of parents said they would reenroll their child in the charter school. [New release October 1999]

10) School Choice Policies in Michigan: The Rules Matter (David Arsen, David Plank and Gary Sykes, Michigan State University): October 1999

Findings: Michigan's school choice policies (including public school choice) have had limited impact on enrollments in most school districts. Innovations adopted in charters tend to be "add-ons," such as all-day kindergarten. Along with oversight from chartering agents, the market is the primary instrument of charter accountability. If charters do not satisfy their constituents, the schools will not survive. Some traditional public school responses to charters are competitive, and districts have added programs and increased marketing to make themselves more attractive to parents and students. Many charters target parents who prefer schools featuring specific ethnic or values orientations.

11) Competition in Education: A 1999 Update of School Choice in Massachusetts (Susan L. Aud, George Mason University): September 1999

Findings: Compares the effects of public school choice and charters on racial and ethnic make-up of Massachusetts school districts, as well as the effects on district budgets. Found that charter schools have a higher percentage of non-white students than the state average (48% vs. 22%); that the highest percentage of transfers to charter schools came from minority districts and that the transfers themselves are over-representative of minorities. Those districts with the highest concentration of minorities experienced a greater balance of racial composition after the charter school program was enacted. Of the 12 districts experiencing the greatest losses of students (and funding) to charter schools as a percentage of enrollment, the largest losses were not concentrated in the highest poverty districts.

12) Competition and Collaboration: How CT Charter Schools Relate to Their Neighborhood Districts (Institute for Responsive Education, Roblyn Anderson Brigham and Jennifer Nahas): September 1999

Findings: Connecticut's charter school law mitigates competition to protect traditional school districts from change. Most lines of communication between charters and peer district schools are in the non-educational areas (with the exception of special education) such as transportation, recruitment, foodservices, and extra-curricular activities.

13) U.S. Department of Education: Third Year Report: May 1999

Findings: Most charter schools have about the same percentage of white students as their district average. More than 70% of charter schools are within 20% of their district's racial/ethnic make-up; 16% had a significantly higher percentage of students of color and 12 % had a significantly lower percentage. Charter schools generally mirror the state's racial composition. However, charter schools in 14 of the 24 charter states enrolled a considerably higher percentage of non-white students

than do other public schools, in some cases resulting from provisions in state law that target charters to serve disadvantaged students. Charter schools serve a significantly higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students compared to all public schools.

14) Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation (Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, Lori A. Mulholland): March 1999

Findings: As part of ongoing evaluation of Arizona charters called for by the State Department of Education, this study analyzes charter school progress to date and found that standardized test scores met or exceeded those of traditional public schools, and that the key reasons for student transfer to charters is that they were not doing well or were unhappy at their former school. Teachers are the best feature of charters according to parents and students, as well as next, school size, class size and attitudes toward parents.

15) Evaluation of the Michigan Public School Academy Initiative (Western Michigan University, Jerry Horn and Gary Miron, The Evaluation Center): February 1999

Findings: Charters (Public School Academies in Michigan) are diverse in their offerings and have forced more accountability on traditional public schools. Discusses some reasons for PSA closures but notes the ability of charter families to vote with their feet. Several challenges include lack of start up funds, access to facilities, special education, and various legal issues relating to charter school operations.

16) Does the Public Sector Competition Stimulate Innovation: The Competitive Impacts of Arizona Charter Schools on Traditional Public Schools (Scott Millman, Frederick Hess, Robert Maranto, James Madison University): February 1999

Findings: School choice impacts traditional districts in desirable ways. Arizona school districts have responded to competition with slight to moderate changes in district and school level behaviors in the "leadership" dimensions (i.e., promoting experimentation in teaching, consulting with staff, following through on initiatives and new programs, providing for all-day kindergarten, promoting teacher professional development). In Arizona, competition appears to have produced changes primarily in more troubled school districts. The impact of competition depends partly on financial incentives, state level maintenance and operations subsidies.

17) Michigan's Charter School Initiative: From Theory to Practice (Public Sector Consultants, Inc. and MAXIMUS, Inc. for the Michigan Department of Education): February 1999

Findings: The most common response of the surrounding district to a charter school opening within its boundaries has been to extend kindergarten to all day. The business side of school operations overwhelms some, but at most schools this early turmoil abates after a year or two of operation. "Creaming" occurs only rarely and, in fact, many of the charter school parents report that their children had been having difficulty in their former, traditional school. The percentage of minorities in the study-area charter schools is higher than in both the state as a whole (68% vs. 14%) and the traditional public school districts in which the charter schools are located (66% vs. 54%). Although starting at a lower point due to the "at risk" nature of their student population, the improvement in MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) test scores among charters is greater than among a comparison group of traditional schools.

18) The Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study (Colorado Department of Education and the Center for Human Investment Policy at The University of Colorado, Denver): January 1999

Findings: Confirms high rate of parental satisfaction and finds that when comparing specific performance of charters to near-identical public schools, over 75% of charters outperformed the scores to their sponsoring district. Charter schools make up only 2% of Colorado public schools, but a full 20% of Colorado "schools of excellence" are charter schools.

1998

19) Texas Open Enrollment Charter Schools: Year Two Evaluation for Texas State Board of Education: December 1998

Findings: Eleven of nineteen schools classified as "at-risk" school because of intention to serve primarily at-risk students. Charter schools enroll higher percentages of Hispanic and African-American students and lower percentages of Anglo students than traditional public schools. African-American students are evenly distributed among at-risk and non-at-risk schools; Hispanics more likely in at-risk schools; Anglos more likely at non-at-risk schools. Parents of students attending at-risk charters are of lower socioeconomic status, and aspirations for their children are lower. The most important factors to parents are educational quality of schools and lower class sizes. Public school officials reported minimal effects from charter schools in terms of funding, student or teacher attrition, parental involvement and programmatic changes. A majority of the schools in this study exist to serve students at risk of dropping out. Charter students performed at lower

levels on TAAS than traditional students did; 40% of schools have acceptable or higher rating compared with 91% of TX public schools in general. Three charters outperformed the state average.

20) The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative: Expanding the Possibilities of Public Education (Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education): December 1998

Findings: More than half the Massachusetts charter schools serve predominantly disadvantaged/at-risk youth; more than half are open longer than the state minimum of days and hours, and more than 70% provide before or after-school programs. The percentage of students who are language minority is 20% vs. a state average of 13%; the percentage representing ethnic minorities is 48% vs. a state average of 22%; the percentage from low-income households is 40% vs. a state average of 25%. The academic performance of students entering charter schools has been at or below district and national averages. After several years, the test results for students in charter schools are promising, with many schools showing significant academic gains.

21) An Evaluation, Charter School Program, State of Wisconsin (Legislative Audit Bureau): December 1998

Findings: A review of the 18 charter schools operating during the '97-98 school year as required by law. School districts benefit from charter law in several ways, including flexible use of teachers, new programs and innovations that would not have been developed had their not been a charter. Racial disparities existed in several schools in which the percentage of minorities did not reflect that of the district, but that is explained by first-come, first-serve enrollment policies that have since been changed. In terms of achievement, charter school test results indicate that charter school students score higher, on average, than other district students and that attendance and suspension rate suggest positive correlations. This study contains policy recommendations designed to reduce tensions between charters and school districts are made.

22) The Findings and Implications of Increased Flexibility and Accountability: An Evaluation of Charter Schools in Los Angeles Unified School District (WestEd Policy & University of Southern California): August 1998

Findings: Motivations vary among those seeking a charter from decision making control to the desire for neighborhood schools. Charters are found to maintain or slightly improve student performance as compared to similar non-charter schools, and were as good or better at retaining students than non-charter schools. Parents and teachers report high levels of satisfaction and collegiality, and both have much involvement in decision making and opportunities to participate.

23) U.S. Department of Education: National Study of Charter Schools: Second Year Study: August 1998

Findings: Charter schools have an estimated median enrollment of 150 students, vs. other public schools in charter states that have an estimated median enrollment of 500. Sixty-two percent of charter schools were newly created, 25% were pre-existing public schools and 13% pre-existing private schools that converted. Sixty percent of charter schools are similar to school districts on student racial/ethnic and income level characteristics, but about a third are more likely to serve students of color and low-income students.

24) Innovation and Massachusetts Charter Schools for the Massachusetts Department of Education (Rosenblum Brigham Associates): July 1998

Findings: Many innovations, special features, or non-traditional practices can be found in charter schools, the most prevalent of which seem to be attention to the development of character, citizenship, respect for self and others, and positive school climate. Rather than specific practices being innovative it is the integration of such practices around a central vision. A sense of competition and even hostility towards charters prevents many traditional school districts from taking advantage of these innovations.

25) New Jersey Charter Schools The First Year, 1997-98 (New Jersey Institute for School Innovation and Teachers College, Columbia University, Pearl Rock Kane): June 1998

Findings: Finds charter schools (first 13 studied) provide more parental involvement, more community awareness, and involvement, and have teachers and administrators who work longer hours than district counterparts and demonstrate higher level of job satisfaction.

26) Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation Final Report (Minnesota State Board of Education and University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, CAREI): May 1998

Findings: Charter schools tend to enroll greater concentrations of students of color than host school districts. An estimated 25% of students attending charters have a disability with an active IEP (vs. an average 15% in host districts) and 47% are eligible for free or reduced lunch (vs. an average 29% in host districts). Approximately 10% of charter school students are limited English proficient (vs. 5% in host districts). Of the schools reporting reading and math standardized test data, 50% reported have a higher percentage of students scoring above the national mean in spring 1997 than in spring 1996 on the math tests. Fifty percent also had a higher percentage of students scoring above the national mean on the reading tests. When the 1997 results from those charter schools with students eligible to participate in the

Minnesota basic graduation tests in reading and math are compared with surrounding districts, 71% report higher percentages passing the reading test and 43% report higher percentages passing the math test – despite the fact that these schools are designed for "at risk" students.

27) Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE): How Are School Districts Responding to Charter Laws and Charter Schools: April 1998

Findings: This examination of how traditional school districts respond to charter schools reports that almost half have felt strong or moderate impact, and effects on about twenty-five percent of districts to charter schools includes increasing public relations, changing educational offerings and other noticeable changes in programs.

28) Making a Difference? Charter Schools, Evaluation and Student Performance (Center for School Change): March 1998

Findings: Charter schools in this preliminary report are meeting accountability requirements and student achievement in 20 schools is summarized, along with student behavior, attitudes, parental involvement and school climate, all of which are positive indicators.

29) 1997 Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation Study (Prepared by the Clayton Foundation for the Colorado Department of Education): January 1998

Findings: Colorado charter schools are serving students of color, students who are educationally disadvantaged by poverty and students who are eligible for special education services. As a group, students attending charter schools in the evaluation study performed better than the statewide average on the state 4th grade reading and writing assessment.

1997

30) Texas Open Enrollment Charter Schools: Year One Evaluation for Texas State Board of Education: December 1997

Findings: Overview of 20 Texas charters in operation as of September, 1997. Survey shows "white-flight" and "bright-flight" are myths. Texas charter schools do not take the best students, and 72% of those attending open-enrollment schools are classified as "at-risk." Seven charters are dropout recovery schools; 11 are specifically designed to meet the needs of "at-risk students," and 80% of students enrolled in charter schools are minorities, compared with 53% in traditional district schools. Eleven schools have waiting lists. Smaller classes, innovative delivery systems, IEPs and creative curricula are all indications of success.

31) Evaluation of Charter School Effectiveness (SRI International for Legislative Analyst's Office of the State of California): December 1997

Findings: Overall, charter schools have an ethnic composition, served percentages of low-income, special education, and limited English proficiency students similar to the state average. Charter school teacher starting salaries are slightly higher than the public schools statewide average.

32) Charter Schools in Action Final Report (The Hudson Institute): July 1997

Findings: Book that consolidates previous reports from 1996. Charter schools are diverse, with 63% of students being minority group members (1996). 81% of students previously enrolled in public schools, 8% private, 2% home-schooled, 4% had dropped out (1996). Approximately 70% of schools pay "comparable" salaries to most or all of their teachers (1996). Families and teachers seek out charters primarily for educational reasons (1997). Satisfaction levels are highest for all groups when it comes to educational matters (curriculum, teaching, class size) (1997). More than half of students is eligible for free/reduced lunches, one in five has limited English proficiency, almost one in five has a disability or learning problem (1996).

33) Test Results from Massachusetts Charter Schools: A Preliminary Study (Massachusetts Department of Education): June 1997

Findings: In general, the academic performance of students entering charter schools was at or below district or national averages. The early preliminary test results for charter schools are promising. Six out of the eight schools for which test data is available are making academic gains. The most dramatic gains came from SABIS International Charter School, where students were performing below grade level when the school was a traditional public school. Seven months after conversion status, students had progressed, on average, 1.5 grade equivalent levels and were performing at or above grade level in grades 2, 4, 6, and 7 and only slightly below grade level in grades 3 and 5.

34) A Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report 1997 (U.S. Department of Education and RPP and CAREI): May 1997

Findings: Reviewed 252 charters in existence in January, 1996. Variations among state laws determine charter's progress. Schools are drivers; no "typical" charter school. Charter schools, on average, have a racial composition similar to statewide averages or have larger portion of minorities. No signs of discriminatory practices or "creaming." Michigan, Minnesota, and Massachusetts enrolled higher percentage of students of color than conventional public schools, and approximately same proportion of low-income students as traditional public schools (although some enroll drastically more). Difficult time accessing Title I funds – 2/3 of schools are eligible, but only 47% receive funding.

35) The Colorado Charter Schools Evaluation (Colorado Department of Education and The Center for Human Investment Policy at the University of Colorado, Denver): March 1997

Findings: Fourteen schools operating for at least a year. Average enrollment smaller than public school counterparts. Six charter schools met or exceeded a significant portion of their performance goals and are making further progress; five schools met or exceeded some of their performance goals and making further progress. Nine schools received 80-85% of district Per Pupil Operating Revenue; on average all charter schools spend 82.5% on student specific expenditures, 17.5% on rent, utilities, maintenance, transportation, etc.

36) Going it Alone: A Study of Massachusetts Charter Schools (Institute for Responsive Education and Northeastern University): March 1997

Findings: High degree of satisfaction: Students feel challenged, teachers feel empowered, parents are content. Parents are happy with the welcoming atmosphere at charter schools and are satisfied with academic attention, largely through IEPs their children receive. Governance is the most significant challenge (time, climate and culture, financial issues are major obstacles).

37) Evidence on School Choice: What we Learn from the Traditional Forms of School Choice in the U.S. (Harvard University, Caroline Hoxby): 1997

Findings: Public schools react to competition by offering better schooling and reducing costs. Increased competition results in significant improvements in student test scores, educational attainments, and wages. Parents with greater choice are more involved in their child's schooling and prefer a higher standard of achievement for both their children (academic achievement) and their chosen school (standards and discipline).

1996 and prior

38) Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation: Interim Report and Research Report (University of Minnesota, CAREI): December 1996

Findings: Examines characteristics of 16 Minnesota charter schools operating for at least one year. Minnesota charters are largely start-ups, and are small with class sizes smaller than traditional Minnesota public schools. Charter schools have a larger percentage of African-American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian students than traditional school counterparts, and also higher percentages of students with disabilities, LEP and free/reduced lunch. Parental/staff satisfaction is higher at charter schools than at traditional schools. More than 50% of parents

report that their children have improved in both academics and social skills since enrolling in charter schools.

39) How Well are Charter Schools Serving Urban and Minority Students? (ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Wendy Schwarz, New York, NY): November 1996

Findings: Charters attract urban students, but not the most vulnerable minority and disadvantaged students. Charters also attract dedicated and talented teachers, but the compensation they provide their teachers is often not competitive with traditional public school salaries.

40) Surveys of Parents and Teachers (The Goldwater Institute): April, August 1996

Findings: Teacher Survey: Twenty percent of Arizona charters operate on a year-round calendar; average student population is 187 students, with an average student/teacher ratio of 22:1; 80% of teachers have experience outside teaching, with largest part formerly in management positions within the private sector. Fifty seven percent of teachers have accountability components in their contracts, unlike most Arizona school districts that do not have teacher accountability contracts. Parent Survey: Children who attend charter schools are not high academic performers. Forty nine percent of parents were "very satisfied with their child's last school, and 51% "very dissatisfied" or "dissatisfied". Main reason parents left former schools to charter was "curriculum/school theme", followed closely by "teacher attitude" and "class size."

41) The Massachusetts Charter School Initiative (Massachusetts Department of Education): July 1996

Findings: Overview of how charter schools operate in Massachusetts (i.e., serve public using public funds; operate independently of union work rules, collective bargaining agreements and conventional school management structure, mission driven; community based; etc.)

42) Massachusetts Charter School Profiles 1996-97 (Pioneer Institute): July 1996

Findings: Profiles 26 charter schools. Reveals that charters do not skim economic or academic "cream;" almost 60% of charter schools located in urban areas, with high percentage of minorities, low socio-economic and ESL students; 90% of students rate teachers as excellent or good; and 96% of parents rate enthusiasm, commitment and quality of staff as excellent or good.

43) Charter Schools: Initial Findings (Education Commission of the States): March 1996

Findings: Reviews data from five states. Notes growing number of charters trying to create a "one-room schoolhouse" effect by serving a broad range of students within a given school. 12% are K-12. Notes that, on average, charter schools exceed the state public school percentages among African-Americans (18% vs. 7%) and Native American (5% vs. 2%). Reports several examples of academic achievement by students in charter schools, despite the focus of most such schools on "at-risk" students.

44) The Charter Movement Education Reform School by School (Little Hoover Commission for the State of California): March 1996

Findings: Academic results are not yet clear, but schools can be judged on partial success of several criteria (based on on-site inspections of 26 schools). Criteria included progress on test scores and other pupil assessment tools, effective fiscal prudence, variety of academic innovations, increased focus on low-achieving students, and avoidance of discrimination. Generally, the findings and recommendations revolved around governance and legal issues.

45) A Profile of California's Charter Schools 1994-95 (San Diego Chamber of Commerce): March 1996

Findings: Analyzes 44 of the 62 charters then operating and finds positive demographics, student test results from CTBS as well as obstacles. Charter schools are small, and larger ones broke up students into "clusters." Sixteen operate outside classroom environment, with several "home-based" or "independent study programs." Majority of student population is racial/ethnic minorities. Charters must demonstrate student progress or face revocation or non-renewal. California has seen its charters increase in daily student attendance, innovative facilities arrangements, and high level of community support (corporations, community groups, and cooperative arrangements with universities). Major problems facing charter schools include legal challenges (labor relation issues), conflict with district on financial matters, state funding issues, vague legal status of charters and liability concerns.

46) The First 20 Texas Open-Enrollment Charter Schools (University of Texas, J.R. Llanes and Marsha Marchbanks): 1996

Findings: Sixty percent of approved charter schools anticipate that they will serve the same percentage of special education students enrolled in the local public schools. Twenty two percent of charters believe their special education enrollment

will be higher than the local rate. The average charter school is addressing basic educational needs. Fifteen percent of charter schools are specializing in serving students who have dropped out of the public schools system. While some charters promise new approaches, most of the first twenty are very traditional in their overall educational plan.

47) Freedom and Innovation California's Charter Schools (U.S. Department of Education and WestEd): November 1995

Findings: Reports findings from a second survey of California's charter schools and from a survey of charter school teachers and non-charter school administrators. Examines varying levels of autonomy found in California's participation.

48) Charter Schools, What Are They Up To?, 1995 Survey (Education Commission of the States and Joe Nathan): August 1995

Findings: Covers seven states, representing (at that time) 80% of authorized charter schools outside California, and 45% of those in California. Most are small. Sixty seven percent are designed to serve cross-section of students; "integrated interdisciplinary curriculum" was most popular academic focus. Lack of start-up funds, finances and facilities most cited obstacles.

49) GAO: Charter Schools: A New Model for Public Schools Provides Opportunities and Challenges, A Report to Congress: January 1995

Findings: An early report reviewing the first charter schools in existence, their autonomy, methods by which they are held accountable and challenges for federal education programs. Points out that charter schools' instructional programs reflect diversity and innovation, including innovative approaches such as multiage grouping and teaching subjects in the context of a common theme.

50) Vision and Reality: A First Year Look at California's Charter Schools: 1994-95 (U.S. Department of Education and WestEd, Marcella R. Dianda & Ronald G. Corwin)

Findings: Written after California's first year of charter school operation, reviews why California had chartered less than half of the number of schools authorized by that state's charter school law. Greatest burdens identified were accountability provisions; lack of assistance and start-up funds; ambiguous laws concerning autonomy; lack of promotion on the part of the school district; unappealing prospect of board control; and lack of interest. Concludes that the on-going resistance of districts to allow the independence of charter schools warrants on-going attention, as does the higher number of development obstacles faced by urban charter schools in developing a charter.

Major Analyses With Critical Conclusions

51) Ethnic Segregation in Arizona Charter Schools (University of New Hampshire, Casey Cobb and Gene V. Glass, Arizona State University): January 1999

Findings: Examines issue of stratification along ethnic and class lines. Claims that charter schools are disproportionately white but these claims are not justified by the statistics/data provided.

52) Beyond the Rhetoric of Charter School Reform: A Study of 10 California School Districts (University of California, Los Angeles, Amy Stuart Wells): December 1998

Findings: Evaluates 17 charter schools and concludes that advocates claim is not justified by observations. Says charters are not accountable for student achievement, that their racial/ethnic requirements have not been enforced, that charters and traditional public schools do not learn from one another.

53) Charting a New Course: Fact and Fiction about Charter Schools (National School Boards Association, Thomas Good, Jennifer Braden): Fall 2000

Findings: After a review of existing literature, the authors conclude that there is no evidence that charters achieve any academic progress, are accountable or are diverse, and that policymakers should pursue changes to make charters fall more in line with existing public school requirements.

Other analyses with credible, positive findings but not research per se:

• School Choice in the Real World, Lessons from Arizona Charter Schools, 1999 (Editor, Bryan Hassel) – Finds that the "rapid spread of charters had an unexpected, overwhelming impact on Arizona education" and charter school competition has forced traditional public schools to improve communication with parents, change curriculum, advertise, open magnet schools.

• A Charter School Survey: Parents, Teachers, and Principals Speak Out, Pacific Research Institute, Patricia Riley, February 2000 – This work finds student populations in California's charters schools mirror demographic and socio-economic characteristics of traditional district schools

Appendix A

COMMON CRITICISMS FROM OPPONENTS AND PROOF THEY ARE UNFOUNDED

• **Balkanization** ***(The Charter Schools-Segregate Argument)***

More than 22 studies demonstrate that charters are overserving those traditionally underserved by failing schools, such as low socio-economic populations and students at risk of dropping out. Three studies suggest that the charters examined serve essentially the same population as the surrounding area.

Charter schools either serve the same demographic characteristics as in traditional public schools, or focus on students in danger of failing. Variations, which may exist, depend upon the neighborhood where the schools are located, but in all cases mitigate in favor of serving larger numbers of minority and ethnic populations.

The reason for larger service to minority children is <u>not</u> owing to "Balkanization," but to the fact that where traditional schools fail to serve their students, the parents want out, and nowhere is this more prevalent than in failing urban public schools serving mostly African-American and Hispanic students.

• **Competition Has No Impact** ***(The Anti-Ripple Argument)***

The combined research of five districts by the State University of New York, by University of California scholars, and by both state and national institutions finds extensive evidence of changes in programs, approaches, behavior and an increased responsiveness to consumers as a result of charters. In some places the impact is muted by policies advocated by opponents of charter schools that protect districts and schools from harm when children choose to leave.

Competition has had the greatest impact where there are strong charter laws; the weakest impact where there are weak charter laws. Prior to the passage of strong charter school laws and the establishment of the resulting charter schools, real reforms moved slowly – or not at all.

• **Innovation Is Lacking** ***(The Prove It's So Different Argument)***

Numerous studies cited show that innovative practice and programs are being implemented in charter schools. The flexibility these schools enjoy has not prompted them to make risky experiments, but rather allows them to use programs that are often not permitted or not extended to teachers because of oversight from distant bureaucracies.

Charter schools also prompt traditional school districts to substantively reform classroom instruction. This impact includes such improvements as adopting instructional programs used by charter schools, developing and building thematic schools to meet the community demand demonstrated by charter schools, and partnering with community colleges for better instruction and program expansion.

The "No Innovation" argument relies on a vague definition that ignores the local variations that exist in public education. Because each charter school responds essentially to local conditions, what may be innovative in one area (i.e., block scheduling or year-round schooling) may be common in another. A charter school offers the opportunity to employ new practices that may otherwise be blocked by bureaucratic or political considerations of the traditional public school district.

• **More Accountability Needed** ***(The Process Versus Progress Argument)***

Critics argue that charter schools lack the oversight of publicly accountable boards and institutions. As proof they point to the fact that charter schools close when they do not serve their mission and to personnel policies that do not mandate district oversight. In reality, that is the kind of "accountability" that has long been absent from public schools. In teacher surveys, freedom from procedural rules and related constraints is often cited as what charter teacher's value most. Charter school accountability is based on goals set and the extent to which parents who choose those schools believe the school is meeting their expectations. Traditional public schools that consistently fail to meet goals (in those rare instances when they are set) are propped up and continue to do a disservice to the children attending them. Charter schools that consistently fail to meet goals (which are always set) are closed; this is an important, powerful measure of accountability.

• **No Evidence They Work** ***(The Double Standard Argument)***

In his report for the National School Boards Association, Thomas Good argues that there is no achievement evidence and therefore, the claim that charters will be better does not hold up. Later, he says that the research is not credible for purposes of comparing student achievement. In reality, many charter schools are

not comparable to similar public schools because of the time in which children have spent there and the benchmarks are not always the same among all schools.

However, research is building in states that administer statewide objective tests based on proficiency in key standards. Fifteen studies show positive achievement and gains among charter schools which, while preliminary and not comprehensive, in fact do show that there is evidence that many work. Nearly every study demonstrates that – although the charter schools reviewed focused on "at-risk" students who *entered* the school performing significantly below grade level – students' progress was at or above the progress recorded by students in surrounding traditional public schools, demographically comparable schools, or the state average.

• Common Good Is Undermined, Sort Of ***(The Choice Is Bad For Democracy Argument)***

Critics say that the common good of public education is undermined when people choose to associate with people whose values they share. The values most identified by parents as reasons for their choosing charters is the value of a good education. Charters are a response to failing schools and deficiencies in traditional public schools. Therefore, charter schools should be judged on how well they satisfy the need and desire for alternatives and not on some larger notion of public good that doesn't necessarily manifest itself in good schools.

Charter schools are based largely upon Accountability. They must be approved by a state agency designed to review the quality and effectiveness of these schools. If the applications cannot clear the bar, or if the schools do not meet their contractual obligations, the public good is not served and the school will not be approved or will be shut down.

Can traditional public schools make the same claim?

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